

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1-17. (cancelled)

18. (new) A network server configured to facilitate communication among a plurality of endpoints, the server comprising:

a network management system configured to automatically and dynamically coordinate cascading of two or more multipoint control units for expanding a number of endpoints in a multi-point conference;

a gatekeeper configured to implement one or more network policies set by a network administrator, wherein the network policies include one or more items selected from the group consisting of: call authorization, call management, network bandwidth management; and

a resource scheduler configured to perform one or more activities selected from the group consisting of: interacting with the calendars of others on the network, sending conference invitations to others on the network, updating participant calendars upon acceptance of an invitation, and communicating with the gatekeeper upon receiving a conference request from one of the endpoints.

19. (new) The network server of claim 18 further comprising:

a gateway operative to provide interface functionality between different network types.

20. (new) The network server of claim 18 wherein the resource scheduler resides in the network management system.

21. (new) The network server of claim 18 wherein the resource scheduler resides in one or more of the plurality of endpoints.

22. (new) The network server of claim 18 wherein the network policies implemented by the gatekeeper vary as a function of time of day or day of week.

23. (new) A method of scheduling a conference call within a network, the method comprising:
- receiving a request for a conference call from a requestor;
 - determining whether the requested conference call may be completed based on one or more network policies; and
 - if the requested conference call may be completed based on the one or more network policies, scheduling the requested conference call and transmitting invitations to conference invitees.
24. (new) The method of claim 23 further comprising:
- if the requested conference call may not be completed based on the one or more network policies, notifying the requestor that the conference call may not be completed.
25. (new) The method of claim 24, wherein the step of notifying the requestor that the conference call may not be completed further comprises proposing at least one alternate conference time at which the requested conference call may be completed based on the one or more network policies.
26. (new) The method of claim 23 further comprising rejecting any competing ad hoc conference calls that conflict with a scheduled conference call.
27. (new) The method of claim 26 further comprising notifying participants in an ad hoc conference call that availability of network resources used by the ad hoc conference call will expire shortly prior to initiation of the scheduled conference call.
28. (new) The method of claim 24 further comprising rejecting any competing ad hoc conference calls that conflict with a scheduled conference call.
29. (new) The method of claim 28 further comprising notifying participants in an ad hoc conference call that availability of network resources used by the ad hoc conference call will expire shortly prior to initiation of the scheduled conference call.

30. (new) The method of claim 25 further comprising rejecting any competing ad hoc conference calls that conflict with a scheduled conference call.

31. (new) The method of claim 30 further comprising notifying participants in an ad hoc conference call that availability of network resources used by the ad hoc conference call will expire shortly prior to initiation of the scheduled conference call.

32. (new) The method of claim 23 further comprising a method for dynamic cascading of multipoint control units, the method comprising:

receiving notification that a conference call has been scheduled, wherein the notification includes one or more network management information parameters selected from the group consisting of: identity of participating endpoint devices, meeting time, identity of multipoint control units used, and required network bandwidth; and

determining from the network management information parameters whether dynamic cascading is required for resource optimization; and

if it is determined that dynamic cascading would benefit the optimization of network resources:

determining an optimum cascade configuration from a plurality of possible configurations based on one or more parameters selected from the group consisting of network scheduling information, network policy information, and network configuration information; and

directing participating devices and multipoint control units to dial into appropriate ports to optimize network resources.

33. (new) A method for dynamic cascading of multipoint control units, the method comprising:

receiving notification that a conference call has been scheduled, wherein the notification includes one or more network management information parameters selected from the group consisting of: identity of participating endpoint devices, meeting time, identity of multipoint control units used, and required network bandwidth; and

determining from the network management information parameters whether dynamic cascading is required for resource optimization; and

if it is determined that dynamic cascading would benefit the optimization of network resources:

determining an optimum cascade configuration from a plurality of possible configurations based on one or more parameters selected from the group consisting of network scheduling information, network policy information, and network configuration information; and

directing participating devices and multipoint control units to dial into appropriate ports to optimize network resources.